

Bridging the Gap

Connecting Child Care and Early Learning, School & Afterschool
and Increasing Public Investment in the Formative Years



Child Care Coordinating Committee
Annual Report 2003



About the Child Care Coordinating Committee

The Washington State Legislature established the Child Care Coordinating Committee in 1988 to advise policymakers. The Committee reports annually to the Legislature, the Governor, and State agencies with strategies to improve the quality of early learning and afterschool programs and make them available and affordable to all.

The Committee consists of 33 members who run, support, fund, regulate, use or are otherwise connected to child care and afterschool programs. Approximately one-third of the committee represent State agencies, while the remaining two-thirds represent community-based organizations, parents, and child care providers.

Subcommittees advise policymakers on aspects of child care: Career Development, Public Policy, Licensing, Subsidies, Inclusive Child Care, Health and Safety, Partnership, School-Age Care, Systems, and Family Focus.

The Division of Child Care and Early Learning, Department of Social and Health Services, provides staffing to the Child Care Coordinating Committee. However, the views expressed in this report are those of the Child Care Coordinating Committee alone.

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The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Child Care Coordinating Committee in the preparation of this report. Also, the work of the ad-hoc editorial committee was invaluable: Agda Burchard (Child Care Coordinating Committee Chair), Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson (Public Policy Committee Chair), Cecelia Callison, Elaine VonRosenstiel, Greg Williamson; Larry Kuper, Leslie Edwards-Hill, Lorrie Grevstad; Mari Offenbecher; Rachael Langen, Sangree Froelicher and Lonnie Johns-Brown.

Material from the Economic Opportunity Institute, Washington School Research Center, and Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction was very helpful in preparing this report. Many people suggested local projects or generously agreed to be interviewed about them: Elaine VonRosenstiel, Paul Rosier, Susan Stockard, Anne Cavanaugh, Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, Jen Cooke, Mari Offenbecher, Carol Rediske-Mudd, Karin Carter, Maura Craig, Jan Gross, Karen Seitz, Lisa White, Tamra Dschaak, Courtney Schrieve, Nancy Kerr, Jan Eggers, Lorraine Olson, Joanne Testa-Cross, Nancy Smith, Joan Youngquist, Carol McCormick, Terry Dixon, Donna Stoess, and Kara Pavone.



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Executive Summary

In this annual report, the Child Care Coordinating Committee(CCCC) continues a focus on links between child care and K-12 public schools to improve both systems.

- The report makes the case for greater investment in child care and early learning and afterschool* from several angles.
- The report also looks at local initiatives bridging child care and early learning, the public schools and afterschool programs.
- The CCCC recommends action by the Legislature, the Governor and state agencies to build good child care, affordable for all, to keep children healthy and safe, to help them succeed in school and life, and to foster economic growth.

New partnerships The 2002 CCCC Report¹ laid out the rationale and opportunity for greater connection between child care and schools. *This year, we look at what is already underway, profiling a small sample of the many local school and child care connections.* These programs, some of many years duration, but many begun recently with new funding sources, are examples of the reasons our communities are choosing to invest in the early years. They also show why and how schools are getting involved with children's afterschool hours. A caveat: the programs profiled are just a few among many and varied efforts. Clearly, not every initiative described would be feasible or even appropriate in every school district. And all efforts take scarce resources; often money and always time and energy.

State government should provide encouragement and financial incentives for collaboration between schools and child care, including afterschool, as well as remove barriers that impede partnerships. We recommend a number of actions, described in full at the end of this report, including the following in 2004:

- ★ Convene a task force to recommend to the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a governance structure that would guarantee consistent policies and goals throughout the early childhood field. Include CCCC representation on the task force.
- ★ Complete the work begun in 2003 by the Governor's Office and OSPI to develop aligned learning standards for all children in early childhood programs. Include CCCC representation throughout the process.
- ★ Request Family Policy Council member agencies to convene a conference to develop and share with local communities best practices in child care, school and afterschool collaboration.
- ★ Continue to develop models for a statewide, universal pre-kindergarten program, in which any child care and early learning program that meets quality standards may participate.

*Throughout this report, we sometimes refer to programs as child care, early childhood, early education and early learning interchangeably. This reflects our understanding that high quality child care programs offer early learning opportunities. Before and afterschool, summer, and school-break child care and supervised activities for children from age 5 to 12 are collectively referred to as afterschool. In a global sense, "child care" also includes afterschool care.

Fundamental problems face child care Along with new opportunity to work with schools, child care still faces persistent problems, with inadequate funding at their root. Wages in child care are too low to keep skilled staff, but most families cannot pay more. Without an infusion of resources to ameliorate this situation, the quality of child care suffers. Without substantial spending on child care subsidies, any licensed care at all is beyond the reach of low-income families. Examining child care in comparison to schools reveals stark differences in how the two systems are funded. Currently the bulk of child care costs are paid by individual families. Once a child reaches five years of age, the situation changes radically — the majority of funding for K-12 comes from the government sector, rather than families.

This report lays out the rationale - from several perspectives - for greater public investment in child care and afterschool programs and the systems that support them.

The CCCC recommends that state government take a number of actions, described in full at the end of this report, to move toward greater public investment in child care and early learning. These efforts to address fundamental problems in child care should begin with the following in 2004:

- ★ Rework the current allocation of funds for State child care subsidies within existing resources, based on data and recommendations from the November 2003 CCCC policy options paper on the State's Working Connection Child Care subsidy program.
- ★ Research potential new, dedicated sources of funding, beyond welfare resources, to share the cost of quality child care and afterschool programs.
- ★ Restore funding cut from community-based programs aimed at increasing child care quality - training, mentoring, on-site consultation, wage increases for those who get education, licensing support, substitute banks, ECEAP slots and health care partnerships — amounting to \$20 million per year.
- ★ Increase the rates paid to child care providers to care for children receiving child care subsidies, to give families greater choice among providers and to cover the cost of good quality care and early education and afterschool programs.



The Situation Today: Progress and Urgency

New state and federal mandates The President's public education initiative *No Child Left Behind* and his *Good Start, Grow Smart* early childhood initiative both call for closer links between the child care and K-12 systems. Most importantly, *No Child Left Behind* sets the bar higher for schools. It requires every district to make adequate yearly progress toward all students meeting achievement standards, and imposes costly consequences if they do not. Likewise, Washington's Education Reform Act of 1993 sets proficiency standards that by 2008 students must meet to graduate high school.

Local communities see that working with child care will help them meet the new standards. In the past year, a number of studies in Washington State have documented widespread and growing local connections between schools and child care and early learning. The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) surveyed all 296 school districts and discovered two-thirds are doing more than is required in providing or supporting early learning opportunities.² EOI also looked at the roots of interest in universal access to pre-kindergarten programs, finding many of the arguments in favor of such a system tied to education reform³. In other research, the University of Washington found that nearly 20% of all school districts chose to spend a portion of their funds from Initiative 728 on pre-kindergarten programs, even in competition with such core uses as class size reduction, facilities and staff training.⁴

Separate efforts to describe the keys to effective programs in schools and in child care and early education reveal a common understanding about what matters. In 2003, the Child Care Coordinating Committee led a successful effort to build consensus among policymakers, practitioners and others involved with the child care and K-12 education fields regarding the meaning of the term "P" or "Pre-K" when used in describing the education system as "P-16." It was agreed that, as a child's learning begins at birth, the Pre-K period begins at birth and extends until a child enters kindergarten. The document describing this agreed upon definition⁵ also lays out guiding principles for realizing the vision that "all children flourish, reaching their full potential through the positive engagement of their families and communities."

In 2002, OSPI reviewed research and extracted nine traits common among high performing schools.⁶ Building-level school leaders are encouraged to assess their progress in terms of how well they are developing these characteristics. A comparison of the Pre-K guiding principles and the Characteristics of High Performing Schools shows agreement about what it takes to achieve excellence⁷. A summary version of these two documents is on the following page.

9 Characteristics of High Performing Schools	Pre-K* Guiding Principles
1. Clear and Shared Vision and Purpose	Seamless Transitions through P-16
2. High Standards and Expectations for ALL Students	Available to All Children
3. Effective Instructional and Administrative Leadership	Highly Qualified Professionals
4. High Levels of Teamwork and Staff	Collaboration Throughout the P-16 System
5. Aligned Curriculum and Instruction with the Standards and Assessments	Opportunity for Social, Emotional, Cognitive and Physical Development
6. Closely Monitored Teaching and Learning	Developmental and Culturally Appropriate Assessment
7. Focused Professional Development in High Need Areas	Highly Qualified Professionals
8. Supportive Learning Environment	Supportive Learning Environments
9. A High Level of Community and Parent Involvement	Parents are Respected as Child's First Teacher

*Pre-Kindergarten early care and learning programs serve children from birth through age five. They may be child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start, ECEAP or part-day pre-schools.



Rationales for Greater Public Investment in the Formative Years and Profiles of Local Collaboration



The Rationale:

Good Child Care and Early Learning Helps Children Enter School Ready for Academic Success

Most children are in child care⁸ The majority of children under age five spend a significant portion of their day in the care of someone other than their parents.

Many children entering kindergarten are assessed unready, and never catch up⁹ Nationwide, about 40 percent of children entering kindergarten are assessed as lacking skills and attitudes that they need to succeed in the classroom. Children that enter school significantly behind their peers frequently don't catch up despite later intervention.

Good quality early childhood programs increase the odds of children entering school ready¹⁰ Children who've been in preschool programs begin kindergarten with more pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills: they know letters, sounds and numbers. Just as good quality helps, poor child care hurts: In national studies, a significant portion of child care centers and homes rated so poor in quality that they are likely to impede children's development and readiness for school, and the majority were only mediocre¹¹.

The impact of good quality child care lasts¹² Children in good quality child care programs do better in math and language throughout the elementary school years.

Local Profile:

Bremerton: A District Works with Child Care to Have All Children Reading at Grade Level by 3rd Grade

The Bremerton School District knew they needed to reach children before kindergarten to achieve the goal of having every child reading at grade level by the time they reached third grade. But how?

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We spent time on the research and that was so important to making informed decisions – we had the hard discussions.

Linda Sullivan-Dudzic
Special Programs Director

They reached out to child care centers, part-day preschools and Head Start programs and invited them to be part of a planning committee. Together, they looked at research showing that early awareness of letter sounds and strong language skills increases the odds that children will become strong readers. They shared views about how young children learn. They chose a curriculum. Then, the district asked child care providers what training schedule would work best for them. Child care centers said monthly Friday nap-time classes – with at-the-center consultation for those who can't get away during the day. Evening classes were best for family child care providers.

Training helps child care providers design activities to help preschoolers learn rhyming and to recognize letter names and sounds. They learn that such skills aren't taught through formal lessons, but “embedded” in everyday preschool activities.

Bremerton also wanted to give parents of young children an interactive video about reading aloud. Kiwanis and Girl Scouts helped put together an attractive package for families. Child care providers distribute them to the parents in their programs.

Each year, the Bremerton district assesses the early literacy skills of kindergartners a few weeks after they enter school. They share the compiled results with the early childhood group so child care providers see the impact of their efforts. **After just one year's experience working with early childhood programs, the proportion of incoming kindergartners who had the needed pre-literacy skills increased between 5 percent and 10 percent.**

Bremerton uses a combination of funding for this early childhood project. They include: Title I (federal funds to serve low-income students), Learning Assistance Program (state funds) and Initiative 728, as well as community support through Kiwanis and Girl Scouts.

In this effort, Bremerton draws upon a history of working with early childhood. For fifteen years the district has worked for inclusive special education preschools. One preschool is combined with Head Start, another with a co-op preschool, and a third purchases spaces in a child care center. The School District staff person who leads the effort to work with early childhood programs has a background working in Head Start.



Local Profile:

Washtucna: School and Child Care Together for Families

Children from ages one to 18 walk into the Washtucna school. The school in a rural and high-poverty area of Adams County enrolls only 64 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Why do they choose to house a small child care center and preschool program as well?

The child care program began in 1999, originally to accommodate teachers who needed care for their children, and operates on parent fees and small grants from area businesses. It is the only licensed child care in the community.

Washtucna and neighboring Kalotus combine the bulk of their Initiative 728 funds to operate the preschool program. When they held the required public hearing on possible uses of the I-728 funds, a number of teachers from the elementary school turned out. They said that the child care program and preschool, which had been run by ECEAP in past years, were preparing the children well for school.

Teachers said the two programs make a difference in their classrooms. Staff note that in the preschool room, teaching is a bit more structured, and in the child care room it is more informal, similar to a parent reading aloud to her child. Both work!

Teachers also credit the preschool and child care programs with reducing the proportion of incoming students needing special education services. They believe they are catching kids early and providing intervention that, in some cases, corrects problems before children enter school. In both the child care and the preschool rooms, the school nurse does health screenings each year and staff go to the school special education director with concerns.

Elementary school students read to the younger children each week. High school students work as aides in the child care program. Some elementary students come to child care after school. The child care and preschool share a playground with the youngest elementary school students. The child care and preschool are invited to school assemblies.

Teachers also credit the preschool and child care programs with reducing the proportion of incoming students needing special education services.

Local Profile:

A Family Child Care Provider Links with Head Start and School

Families in Tamra Dschaak's family child care home get not only care and early education, but an advocate as they transition to school. Dschaak has been a licensed family child care provider in Spokane for nine years. The children she cares for are from low-income families, nearly all relying on state child care subsidies. Many have parents in treatment for drug or alcohol addiction.

Dschaak feels being involved with school helps the children she cares for succeed, and sees herself as part of a network of support for families.

**Tamra Dschaak,
Licensed Family**

Because she believes "her children" need all the extras they can get, Dschaak encourages families in her program to enroll their four year olds in Head Start, and drives the children there and back daily. She talks regularly with the Head Start staff about children's progress, and occasionally goes into the classroom to observe. She and younger children often go along on Head Start field trips. Head Start shares their community resources guide with her, a tool she has found helpful to assist families.

In recent years, as she's taken classes toward her Child Development Associate credential, Dshaak has become more formal in her efforts to help children learn. She now plans curriculum - using many of the same activities she did in early years, but with a new understanding of what children gain from them - and makes sure she is covering all learning areas. Working with a mixed age group is challenging, but she knows how to adapt a project for the two, three and four year olds sitting around her table.

Dschaak takes the children to assemblies and other activities at the elementary school near her home, a practice she began when her own children were in elementary school. Because she does before- and after-school care for children, she is in and out of the school twice a day, and knows the staff well. In the spring, she takes children who will be starting school in the fall to meet the kindergarten teachers and tour the school building. She sometimes accompanies young and unconfident parents to meetings with teachers. She shares with parents and teachers her observations and concerns about children's development. Dschaak feels being involved with school helps the children she cares for succeed, and sees herself as part of a network of support for families.

Recommendations:

What should the Legislature, Governor and state agencies do this year to encourage and support child care and early learning programs that help children enter school ready for academic success?

- Convene a task force to recommend to the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a governance structure that would guarantee consistent policies and goals throughout the early childhood field. Include CCCC representation on the task force.
- Complete the work begun in 2003 by the Governor's Office and OSPI to develop aligned learning standards for all children in early childhood programs. Include CCCC representation throughout the process.
- Continue to develop models for a statewide, universal pre-kindergarten program, in which any child care and early learning program that meets quality standards may participate.
- Restore funding cut from community-based programs aimed at increasing child care quality - training, mentoring, on-site consultation, wage increases for those who get education, licensing support, substitute banks, ECEAP slots and health care partnerships — amounting to \$20 million per year.



The Rationale:

Good Child Care, including Afterschool Programs, Help Prevent Behavior Problems in Schools... and in Society

Good early childhood education helps children enter school with the social and emotional skills they need for success in school¹³ Children who have had high quality child care are more likely to be eager to learn and to get along with their teachers and with other students and are less likely to have behavior problems in school.

Principals report that participation in high quality afterschool programs improves the overall effectiveness of the school, student motivation, student attitude toward school, and student attendance¹⁴. Teachers and principals credit participation in afterschool with reducing vandalism, fighting and increased grades and cooperation with adults¹⁵.

Participation in afterschool activities increases the odds of academic success as measured through test scores, absenteeism, school dropout rates, homework completion, and school grades¹⁶.

Good care helps prevent problems into the teen and adult years: Children who have had high quality early education are less likely to need remedial or special programs and more likely to finish school, get jobs and avoid welfare¹⁷.

Afterschool programs are most successful when they have connections with what the student is learning and doing during the school day¹⁸

Parent involvement is important to school success¹⁹ and afterschool programs linked with schools make it easier for parents to get involved²⁰

Local Profile:

John Hay Elementary and Kids Company: A Team

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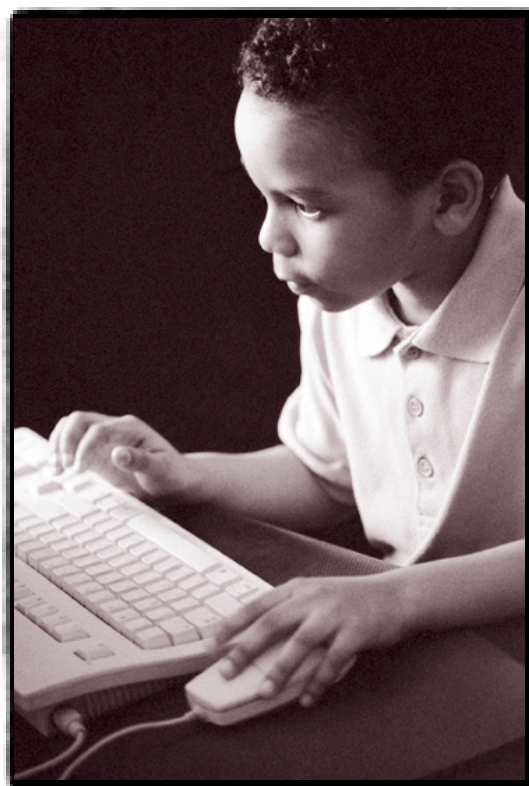
We try to wrap our arms tightly around the child and family and look not just at the academics but at the whole child, and Kid's Company is an important part of that.

Joanne Testa-Cross,
Principal, John Hay Elementary

At John Hay Elementary School in Seattle, the principal says “we are a tight-knit team.” What makes this statement unusual is that this school leader includes in the “we” the afterschool program that serves a quarter of the school's 400 students. Kid's Company is a non-profit licensed child care program, accredited through the National School Age Care Alliance, that has operated an afterschool program at Hay for thirteen years. The Kid's Company director serves on the school's site council and attends staff meetings - she's involved in decision-making about what happens at the school. She is on the e-mail list for staff and has an in-box in the school office. The principal remembers that it took a mental shift to get in the habit of keeping the afterschool program in the loop, but now it's automatic.

What are some of the results of making afterschool part of the team? The school and child care share space. In return for the use of the child care space for enrichment classes during the day, the school lets Kid's Company use the cafeteria before and after school. Having two spaces allows the afterschool program to divide by age. Age groupings, in turn, enable the program to better tailor activities to children's interests and to what they are studying in school.

Afterschool and school staff work together to link afterschool activities to school subjects. For example, last year the staff and afterschool director looked at WASL test results and saw that students were lagging in their ability to pull information from what they read. Teachers and afterschool staff both used planning time to figure out how to address this problem. During the school day, teachers emphasize scanning text for information. Afterschool, Kid's Company reinforces this skill in a practical way, by encouraging students to, for example, read a recipe when baking muffins and consult the directions to resolve disputes over board game rules.



Teachers and afterschool staff talk weekly. The afterschool program has a regular homework time, and teachers explain what a particular child needs to practice. Parents, teachers and afterschool staff meet together to make a plan when a child is having behavior problems - consistent rules at home, school and afterschool work best. Teachers appreciate that the afterschool program gets to know the child and family well - caring for children all day in the summer and 2-3 hours a day during the school year for several years. Parents come in and out of the afterschool program twice a day - picking up and dropping off - so teachers working with afterschool staff get to communicate with parents.

Kid's Company provides child care for all evening meetings at the school. The availability of child care, especially care from providers the parents and children know, makes it easier for parents to attend meetings at the school and get involved.

Beyond the convenience of having child care on site, the school principal believes that parents and students are comforted by the sense that there are a whole group of people - not just one or two teachers - looking out for each child.



Local Profile:

Spokane: Running Afterschool Programs Directly

Spokane Public Schools is one of a handful of districts around the state that run afterschool child care programs directly. The district's Express Child Care program has been around since 1982 and serves 1,800 children on any given day, operating at 28 elementary schools. Afterschool staff are district employees, earning wages that are higher than the child care industry average and full medical benefits. As a result, the program has much lower than typical staff turnover; the director estimates fewer than 10% of staff leave in a year, compared to over 50% in a typical afterschool program.



Five years ago the district received a federal 21st Century Grant, for youth development activities that foster academic success. The child care program also runs these programs, called Hubs Community Learning Centers. Hubs offer free afterschool homework clubs and enrichment activities such as cooking, sports and arts for 4th through 8th graders in elementary and middle schools. Children may attend Hubs programs on some days and child care on others, or go to child care after Hubs activities end at 4:30. Without surrounding child care, Hubs activities would not work for parents who have to be on the job until 5:30 or 6 PM. Buoyed by community volunteer and financial support, and evaluations showing that Hubs improves students performance and behavior and parent involvement, the district is currently using a portion of I-728 funds to keep the program going as federal funds decline.

Recommendations:

What should the Legislature, Governor and state agencies do this year to encourage and support child care and afterschool programs that help prevent behavior programs and encourage school involvement?

- Continue to develop models for a statewide, universal pre-kindergarten program, in which any child care and early learning program that meets quality standards may participate.
- Restore funding cut from community-based programs aimed at increasing child care quality - training, mentoring, on-site consultation, wage increases for those who get education, licensing support, substitute banks, ECEAP slots and health care partnerships — amounting to \$20 million per year.

The Rationale:

Good Child Care Helps the Economy²¹:

Parents who have unreliable child care or child care with which they are dissatisfied are more likely to quit their jobs, be distracted, arrive late or miss work. The National Conference of State Legislators estimates that poor quality child care costs U.S. businesses \$3 million dollars a year through absenteeism alone.²² On the other hand, businesses believe employee morale and productivity go up and absenteeism and turnover go down when families get help meeting their child care needs.²³

Good quality child care is an investment in tomorrow's workforce as well as today's. The demand is high today for employees who have ability to read, write, reason and use computers. Even more jobs in the future will require these skills.

What we are doing now isn't making the grade²⁴. Businesses provide remedial training in basic skills to half their employees. No wonder, given that 15% of American-born college graduates are functionally illiterate, only a third of 4th graders in the U.S. read at grade level, and only 40% of Washington 10th graders meet WASL standards in math.

Quality child care is the most cost-effective way to decrease the number of unskilled adults in the future.²⁵ Early childhood is the time when basic pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills are most easily learned. It is also the time when fundamental attitudes that shape behavior throughout life are established. Good child care helps children gain the academic and social skills that will help them succeed in school and life - and poor child care can cause life-long harm.

The entire society – not just the family – benefits when children get a good start in life through high quality early childhood programs. So, the community, and not just parents, have a responsibility to help support these programs.

Economists have documented that investment in high quality early childhood programs brings a higher rate of return than most other public or private spending²⁶.

Local Profile:

Longview: Schools, Community, Foundations

In Longview a coalition of early childhood educators and school staff — called Sequenced Transition to Education in the Public Schools (STEPS) — have worked for several years to make the move from child care to school smooth for families. When the school district discovered 45% of their incoming kindergartners had language delays of one year or more, they decided they needed to reach preschoolers. As a result of the connections from the STEPS committee, the district knew that 60% of preschool age children in their community were in licensed child care centers or family child care homes. They use I-728 funds to offer training, through the local child care resource and referral agency, for a group of child care providers on creating a literacy-rich environment. The district has also opened special education preschools to typically developing children on a tuition basis. In one elementary school, local foundation support and Title I funds help them offer a preschool program for all four year olds living in the area.

When the school district discovered 45% of their incoming kindergartners had language delays of one year or more, they decided they needed to reach preschoolers.



Local Profile:

School Funded Reading Foundations Work with Child Care

Reading Foundations, located in four Washington communities, have a straightforward mission: to get parents to read to their children 20 minutes a day from birth. The local Reading Foundations serving the Olympia and TriCities areas, non-profit agencies funded by a \$1.00 per student per year assessment from participating school districts, are working with child care programs to read and to carry the message to parents. They do so because so many children are in child care and because they see child care providers as trusted role models for many families.

In Thurston County, the South Sound Reading Foundation trains a corps of volunteers who go out to child care centers and read with children. A group of family child care providers and the children they care for meet together at the local child care resource and referral agency and, again, volunteers read with the children. Children go home with donated books and literature for mom and dad about the importance of reading 20 minutes a day.

In Tri-Cities, where the Mid-Columbia Reading Foundation began seven years ago, the Foundation recently collaborated with the local community college, public health district, business partners and others to offer Loving, Listening and Learning, a series of classes for family child care providers on helping young children learn. They had to cap enrollment at 82 providers, through whom they reached 600 children.

The success and involvement of the Reading Foundation helped persuade the Kennewick School District to spend a portion of I-728 funds on pre-kindergarten activities. So did their kindergarten assessment data, which showed a large percentage of kids entered kindergarten so far behind that they couldn't catch up in a year.

In addition to expanding ECEAP slots, Kennewick started *READY for Kindergarten!* to teach parents of children from birth to five years about play activities that help their children get ready for reading and math. About 800 of the estimated 3,500 parents of children under five living within the district boundaries attended a *READY* class last year as the program was piloted. Family child care providers and relative caregivers were also invited and attended in large numbers. *READY* will expand this year, offering classes in housing projects and churches to reach more families and child care providers.

Recommendations:

What should the Legislature, Governor and state agencies do this year to encourage and support child care and early learning programs that help the economy?

- Rework the current allocation of funds for state child care subsidies within existing resources, based on data and recommendations from the November 2003 CCCC policy options paper on the State's Working Connection Child Care subsidy program.
- Research potential new, dedicated sources of funding, beyond welfare funding, to share the cost of quality child care and afterschool programs.
- Increase the rates paid to child care providers to care for children receiving child care subsidies, to give families greater choice among providers and to cover the cost of good quality care and early education and afterschool programs.

The Rationale:

Good Child Care Promotes Healthy Development



It is important that child care and early learning programs - like schools - have access to expertise regarding health, safety, developmental and nutrition issues.

Child care and early learning programs bring young children together in groups. This means there is risk of broad transmission of infectious disease. **Good practices, such as frequent hand-washing by adults and children and up to date immunizations, can reduce the transmission of disease.**

Child care and early learning programs can help children develop good health, safety and nutrition habits early in life. For example, child care offers a venue for efforts to stem the epidemic of childhood obesity by teaching young children the habits of vigorous exercise and healthy food choices.

Likewise, in child care, knowledgeable providers working with health professionals can detect and address social and emotional issues common today. Early assistance helps to reduce the impact of these challenging behaviors in school.

Child care and early learning programs provide an opportunity to screen young children for health and developmental concerns²⁷. When hearing, sight, language, cognitive, motor or other deficits are caught early, the impact on a child's growth and learning is less and problems may be more easily corrected²⁸. Untreated health conditions such as asthma and dental decay are epidemic among poor children²⁹. Screening is particularly important for the 10.5% of Washington children under six who do not have health insurance³⁰.

Child care is a natural environment in which to assist and include children with special needs. Children who have special needs do best if they receive intervention – for example, physical therapy for a child who has poor muscle tone – in places that are familiar and comfortable to them. Children with special needs also benefit from being included in early learning programs for children who are typically developing³¹.

Local Profile:

Skagit Islands Head Start: Working with Public Health, School Districts and Child Care

In Skagit, Island and San Juan counties, Head Start works with public health nurses who have expertise in promoting good health practices in child care programs. In the past, the program employed a health specialist to work with all of their 14 sites. But now, Head Start contracts with public health nurses in each community – registered nurses who also work as consultants to child care centers and family child care homes.

The nurses observe classrooms and make suggestions regarding safety, review health policies and practices, do vision and hearing checks, and well-child screenings. Head Start staff say the nurses recognize problems others without a medical background miss.

In addition to their expertise, the nurses' ties to the local medical communities are helpful. The nurses have greater success than an outsider would in helping families on Medicaid or without any insurance find a regular health care provider

Around the state, Head Start and ECEAP sometimes strengthen a child care program - through adding staff and providing training and consultation – rather than operating a stand-alone program. For example, the Skagit Islands Head Start works with the Skagit Valley Children's Center, a child care center that serves many low-income children. The local school district does likewise, sending therapists into this center to work with children under five who have delays or disabilities. Families get the full-day full-year schedule they need to work. All children get high quality care and early learning. Children with special needs get the extra help they need, while learning and playing with typically developing kids.

Recommendations:

What should the Legislature, Governor and state agencies do this year to encourage and support training and consultation for child care programs regarding health, safety, developmental and nutrition issues:

- Restore funding cut from community-based programs aimed at increasing child care quality - training, mentoring, on-site consultation, wage increases for those who get education, licensing support, substitute banks, ECEAP slots and health care partnerships — amounting to \$20 million per year.

Recommendations for Action in 2004 and Beyond



Recommendations for Action in 2004 and Beyond

State government should act to provide encouragement and financial incentives for collaboration between schools and child care, as well as to remove barriers that impede partnerships.

State and federal mandates give new urgency to efforts to improve achievement among K-12 students, and research demonstrates that early childhood is the critical and most cost-effective time to intervene. Local efforts around the state demonstrate that citizens are ready for closer ties between schools and child care, and see the need to act. The Legislature, Governor and/or State agencies should:

- ★ Convene a task force to recommend to the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a governance structure that would guarantee consistent policies and goals throughout the early childhood field. Include CCCC representation on the task force.
- ★ Complete the work begun in 2003 by the Governor's Office and OSPI to develop aligned learning standards for all children in early childhood programs. Include CCCC representation throughout the process. Federal funding for child care requires DSHS to develop early learning goals for children in child care and voluntary guidelines for child care programs**. The Governor's Office and OSPI have committed to work together on this goal. This work should proceed with draft joint standards proposed by December 2004.
- ★ Request the Family Policy Council member agencies to convene a conference to develop and share with local communities best practices in child care, school and afterschool collaboration. DSHS, OSPI, the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, the Department of Health and the Employment Security Department should sponsor an event to highlight promising practices in child care, school and afterschool collaboration and to provide tools and consultation to local communities. A special effort should be made to include family child care providers and their unique contributions to the child care system. Connections among child care, early intervention and health promotion efforts should also be included.
- ★ Continue to develop models for a statewide, universal pre-kindergarten program, in which any child care and early learning program that meets quality standards may participate. Models should build on existing early childhood programs including child care centers, family child care homes, ECEAP, Head Start, private part-day preschools, co-op preschools through the community colleges, and special education preschools through the public schools. Part day pre-kindergarten programs for children of working parents should mix seamlessly with the care children receive for the rest of the work day.

** As part of the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative, states are required, as a condition of receiving the federal Child Care Development Fund block grant, to develop voluntary guidelines for child care programs on promoting literacy and numeracy. States must also develop plans for education and professional development of child care providers and coordination across early childhood programs and funding streams.



- ★ Provide incentives for schools to work with all types of child care providers, pre-schools, Head Start and ECEAP programs to help children enter kindergarten ready for academic and social success. Early learning takes place in homes, child care, and preschools. Early learning opportunities are essential if children are to enter school ready to succeed. Local programs and research provide many models for successful collaboration. Initiative 728, Learning Assistance Program, Special Education, and Title I are among the public school sources of funding that can be used for these

purposes. Head Start, ECEAP and child care subsidy funds are also available. Initiatives such as STEPS³² and Seattle's Project Lift Off³³ can help convene organizations.

- ★ **Provide incentives for schools and afterschool programs to work together.** Afterschool programs linked to schools reduce behavior problems, support academic goals, and enhance communication with parents. Innovative local programs provide models. Site councils and staff meetings offer forums for collaboration at each school building.
- ★ **Educate parents of young children birth to age five, their caregivers, schools and community leaders about how to help children prepare for school and help schools welcome kindergartners.** One model for such an effort is *Getting School Ready*, a brochure created by the Getting School Ready Project³⁴ – a King County coalition of business, philanthropic, school, health and early childhood leaders. This document describes how to help children learn, through everyday activities, early skills needed to enter school. It also shows the essential components that must be present if schools are to meet the diverse needs of incoming kindergartners.
- ★ **Provide models and encourage the use of appropriate methods for assessing the abilities of young children.** To avoid missing real problems or finding delays where none actually exist, assessment tools right for young children are essential. One example of such a method is the Maryland Model for School Readiness³⁵, especially the Work Sampling System™ which documents and supports children's skills, knowledge, and behavior.

State government should move toward greater public investment in child care and early learning to address fundamental problems.

- Provide financial support to help low-income families pay for child care and afterschool services.
- Provide financial support for child care and afterschool programs to increase staff wages and meet quality standards.

To work or obtain training to sustain their families, low-income families must have financial assistance to pay for child care. Subsidy eligibility must be set high enough and co-payment levels low enough that no family has to pay more than 10% of their income for child care. Rates must be high enough that every family has access to good quality care.

Good quality child care and afterschool programs, available to all families that need it, help school reform and economic development efforts succeed and help prevent behavior problems. Poor quality care, in contrast, does none of the above, and contributes to lack of readiness for school and difficulties that last a lifetime.

The market rate for child care — what parents and state subsidies pay — is not sufficient for child care programs to offer wages high enough to attract and retain educated and skilled staff. As a result, the majority of child care programs are of only mediocre or poor quality.

The Legislature, Governor and/or state agencies should:

- ★ Rework the current allocation of funds for state child care subsidies within existing resources, based on data and recommendations from the November 2003 CCCC policy options paper on the State's Working Connection Child Care subsidy program. Without additional funds, the state must make tradeoffs between making child care subsidies available to as many families as possible, keeping co-payments affordable, and paying child care providers enough to provide access to a reasonable level of care. For example, DSHS estimates that decreasing eligibility for subsidies from 225% to 200% of the federal poverty level led to about 1,140 families losing this financial support. They estimate that the higher co-payments begun in March 2003 will eliminate around 2,340 families. Based on the results of research on impacts of various tradeoffs, the Child Care Coordinating Committee made recommendations regarding the configuration of eligibility, co-pays, bonuses, and rates likely to cause the least harm to families and children. These recommendations should be implemented by the Administration.



- ★ **Research potential new, earmarked sources of funding, beyond welfare resources, to share the cost of quality child care and afterschool programs.** Child care costs are an important part of the budget for welfare reform since good quality and reliable child care is essential to enable low-income parents to work. However, child care, including afterschool, supports the entire society, so it is not appropriate for such a large share of funding for the child care system to come only from welfare funds. The state should seek new earmarked funding to dedicate to early care and education and afterschool programs.
- ★ **Restore funding cut from community-based programs aimed at increasing child care quality - training, mentoring, on-site consultation, wage increases for those who get education, licensing support, substitute banks, ECEAP slots and health care partnerships — amounting to \$20 million per year.** ECEAP funding cuts in 2001-03 meant 1,058 fewer children served. Funding for many types of child care provider education and consultation have been reduced or eliminated, despite research showing trained child care workers offer better quality care. The innovative Career and Wage Ladder pilot aimed to reduce child care staff turnover and encourage education was eliminated. Child care health partnerships, substitute banks, mentoring and licensing supports and other effective services have all been eliminated or reduced.
- ★ **Increase the rates paid to child care providers to care for children receiving child care subsidies, to give families greater choice among providers and to cover the cost of good quality care and early education.** According to the DSHS 2002 market rate survey, the statewide average reimbursement rate is around the 36th percentile of the local private market rate. The federal Child Care Bureau recommends that states provide reimbursement at the 75th percentile. The low rates limit the range of child care programs that will accept children on subsidies, often putting good quality higher cost programs out of the reach of poor families. Moreover, these rates – being set based on what privately paying families can afford – simply do not cover the cost of good quality child care.
- ★ **Expand the True Cost of Care³⁶ project beyond Seattle/ King County to develop statewide data on the gap in funding.** This research project used actual child care center budgets to estimate the cost of good quality child care at 175% of the current King County private market rate.
- ★ **Exempt mothers of infants from birth to 12 months of age from the TANF work requirements.** Capitalize on this unique period of time to provide appropriate parent education to help these parents meet the developmental needs of their infants.



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